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The Art Union

PUBLISHED MONTHLY.

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ART UNION.

Correspondence on Art matters is respectfully solicited.

Notices of all forthcoming Exhibitions and Art Sales throughout the country are desired, as well as copies of the Catalogues of Public and Private galleries and transient Exhibitions, and reports of Art Sales.

All communications relating to the Literary Department of this journal should be addressed to CHARLES M. KURTZ, No. 44 East Fourteenth Street, Union Square, New York.

All communications relating to the Business Management of the Journal, or having reference to advertising in the Journal or Catalogues of The Art Union, should be addressed to "Business Department, American Art Union," No. 44 East Fourteenth Street, New York.

For terms of subscription to THE ART UNION, and rates for advertising in the same, see the "Business Department" of this Journal.

VOL. I.

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No. 3.

EDITORIAL.

TO OUR GOOD FRIENDS.

WE wish to thank our friends—and especially our journalistic friends—for the very cordial reception accorded to the second number of THE ART UNION. We shall strive to merit the many pleasant words which have come to us, by endeavoring to make each number of the journal better than its predecessor. The increase of subscriptions to THE ART UNION during the past month has been exceedingly gratifying. The more subscribers we receive, the better able shall we be to make a success of the Union and the journal. By a change in the size of our type, the present number of the journal contains considerably more matter than either of the first two numbers.

THE OLD ART UNION AND THE NEW ONE.

THIS month, we publish the first portion of an article upon the old American Art Union, which covers enough of its history to show how much may be accomplished by concentrated efforts, when the sympathies of the people can be aroused in a given direction.

The first Art Union, like the present organization, was founded in order to advance the cause of American Art in the United States. The declaration of its aims and the explanation of the advantages it offered to its annual subscribers were spread broadcast throughout the country, and after the people came to understand what it was and what it meant—for the art of the country and for themselves—they rallied to its support with enthusiasm. There was sincere regret in many circles when the old Art Union was dissolved, and the popular interest in art waned materially

thereafter. At this point, the dealers in foreign pictures saw their opportunity and began to manipulate the market, and they were so successful in creating a fashion for the works of foreign artists, that after a while the average American picture buyer was more willing to pay a high price for an unauthenticated foreign picture of indifferent merit, than to pay any price for an American production of the most decided merit.

The result of this was most disastrous to American Art, and while, in the increasing wealth and art-interest of the country, American artists found sufficient intelligent patronage to make it worth their while to paint, it was a fact that American Art no longer ruled in America. The popular art was imported art, and the popular appreciation of art was an imported appreciation.

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The traditions of the old Art Union still lived, however, and some of the American artists who remembered it gratefully, and who deplored the deposition of American Art and the installation of a foreign standard based upon a fashion governed by dollars and dealers, resolved that if earnest, united efforts could bring before the people a fair representation of the just claims and merits of American Art; if there could be a better dissemination of the principles of art among the people; if American artists could be encouraged to unite to help each other, and be given a practical incentive to strive to surpass the best work produced abroad, these efforts should be made. To this end the present American Art Union was established.

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At first sight it might appear that there was little difference between the first American Art Union and the present organization; but, while both were established for the extension and popularization of American Art, there are very essential differences in the organization, government and methods of the society that was and the society that is, in the direction of the accomplishment of these ends. The former Art Union was established and governed throughout its career by business men; artists had no voice in its management. The paintings selected for its annual distribution were selected by business men, who, though exercising their best intentions, nevertheless could scarcely act with the same discretion that might govern the selections of professional artists, who by reason of special fitness or long study have a better knowledge of such matters, and therefore should be better qualified to present the claims of art intelligently and to discriminate wisely in the purchase of pictures with the Subscription Fund.

* * *

The fact that the present Art Union is governed by artists, commends it not only to the art-loving people of the country, but to the artists themselves. The subscribers to the Union may feel better assured that true artistic principles will be kept in view and good art works will be published and disseminated; and the artists may feel that it will be genuine merit which will be rewarded, and that the benefits and profits accruing to the society through the exhibition and sale of their works will not pass into the hands

of outside parties, but will be shared by themselves in being devoted to the upbuilding, strengthening and popularizing of the art by which they live. Election to active membership in the Art Union is a recognition by the society of distinguished professional merit in the artist so elected.

* * *

The old Art Union was only advantageous to the artists in that it bought pictures from them and advertised them rather extensively. Its exhibition did not contain artists' works that were for sale, but works which had been bought by the Union for the annual distributions. The present Art Union's exhibition contains works that are for sale; its gallery is a permanent salesroom for the artist who is a member of the Union, and he always may be represented there by one or more of his works. But this is not all. Through the Art Union, the artist deals directly with his patron, instead of dealing with him through an art dealer, and thus, by avoiding the payment of heavy commissions, can not only offer his work at a much lower price, but at this lower price has a much better opportunity to sell. He increases the number of persons able to buy his picture in a regular ratio as he decreases its price. In the past, the average artist has been something like the average inventor; he has done the work and other people have manipulated his work so as to make all the money that was to be made out of it, for themselves. The Art Union, in changing this condition of affairs, changes it to the advantage not only of the artist, but of the picture-buyer as well.

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Then the present Art Union does a great deal towards advancing the art interest of the country through its system of special exhibitions held in various cities during the summer months. It takes the best art of the country to the very doors of hundreds and thousands who have little or no opportunity to come to New York to see it; it encourages a love for art among the people; it teaches the differences between worthy and unworthy art, and aids in the cultivation—the refinement—of every community it visits. It thereby also extends the market for each artist, by bringing his work before thousands of persons who otherwise never might see it, and enhances the possibility that it may meet the eye of some picture buyer whose appreciation turns toward its particular subject or method of treatment. But even if the work should not be sold in a season, in its travels through the country, it well advertises the artist—who by the way, realizing the importance of this, is naturally inclined to send out a work which shall advertise him at his very best. This insures an exhibition of a high character, such as is best calculated to advance the art interests of the country.

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The present Art Union is more liberal to its subscribers than was the old Art Union. According to the scheme of the old society, the money received from subscriptions was to be devoted—*after the expenses of the society were paid*, "to the production of a large and costly original engraving from an American painting, and to the purchase of paintings or other works of art for distribution." Thus the

proportion of the subscriptions devoted to the purchase of pictures was indefinite, depending entirely upon the proportionate amount of the expenditures. The present Art Union devotes *one-half* of the money received from the annual subscriptions to the purchase of paintings for its subscribers, without any deduction from it to pay for the etching, or the excess of expenditure beyond the other half, which may be necessary to meet the expense of the gallery or of the journal.

* * *

The former Art Union was practically a lottery, and while its influence for good was paramount, nevertheless it came under the law. The present Union has nothing to do with any lottery scheme. With one-half of the money received from subscriptions, it purchases pictures for its subscribers, and delivers them to a committee of the subscribers. This committee will dispose of them in a manner acceptable to the majority of the subscribers. But however the pictures may be disposed of by the subscribers, each subscriber receives four or five times the value of his subscription in the etching alone, and it will be the endeavor to make the monthly journal worth, at least, five dollars a year, in addition.

THE BOGUS PICTURE BUSINESS.

HERE is something from the New York *Tribune*, which is so thoroughly sensible that it will bear republication :

The authenticity of foreign pictures has become a sore subject in many circles during the last few months. M. Vertan's extensively copied statements relative to the number of bogus Corots, Daubignys, etc., sold yearly in Paris, and the lectures upon the counterfeiting of paintings delivered by M. Jacques de Biez, appear to have set the ball in motion, and the matter is likely to be well ventilated on both sides of the water. Artists like Gerome, Carolus Duran, Duez and Boulanger have petitioned the French Senate for immediate action upon the Bardoux bill, which punishes the counterfeiting of pictures or signatures by fine and imprisonment. Two curious cases have recently occurred, one in which a supposititious Corot owned by Alexander Dumas was found to have been painted by Trouillebert, and the other, the prohibition of M. Garnier's sale at the Hotel Drouot by Karl Daubigny on the ground that there were several pictures upon which the signature of his father, Charles Francois Daubigny, had been counterfeited. Such occurrences are hardly reassuring to American collectors, but some of our artists evidently have faith that the collectors will be made to see the error of their ways and turn to buying American pictures. It is not improbable that some good may come from this agitation. If people can be induced to stop buying sheer rubbish which they honestly don't like, simply because it bears fashionable foreign names, if they will select foreign work of sound inherent merit, in case foreign work is preferred, and if they will only stop passing by good American pictures simply because they are American, to buy costly imported daubs, such a change of heart will be well worth the shattering of a few illusions, and perhaps here and there some pecuniary loss. It is quite possible for artists and picture-buyers to steer a middle course between spread-eagleism and snobbery. There is a very common reason for making purchases which is not usually applied in the case of pictures. People buy other things because they like them—why shouldn't they buy the pictures that give them the most satisfaction? If a man begins to make a collection he is reasonably sure to educate his tastes to some extent. If he buys only a handful of pictures which suit his fancy there is no reason why he should not enjoy them although all the critics rage against him. If more independence were shown in picture buying, there might not be such a host